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DEMONSTRATIONS

O F

Religion and Virtue.

I N

TWO DISCOURSES.



L O N D O N:

Printed for R. and J. DODSLEY in Pall-mall;  
and W. SANDBY in Fleet-street.

MDCCLIX.

Mr Macdougall sends compliments to Mrs de Grey,  
desires her acceptance of the inclosed, and takes the liberty  
of recommending a treatise entitled, Demonstrations of  
religion and virtue — printed for Mr Boddley & Sandby pri  
It may be recommended as a system of morality & religion  
no less clear than concise, and an antidote against the  
poison of enthusiasm, against all superstition and vice.



## P R E F A C E.

**I**N the following discourses religion and virtue are built on immoveable foundations, and the reader is furnished with such principles as will prevent him from following after deceivers, and from falling into the snares of sophistry and fraud. Dissatisfied with those writers who treat of virtue in abstract and obscure terms; and with those who make religion dependent on church-tradition and church-authority, the author has here endeavoured to express his thoughts in a more instructive manner, and to render



## P R E F A C E.

subjects of the utmost concern to all men intelligible to all. The public it's hoped will at least excuse his well-meant endeavours, which have nothing farther in view than to obviate evils pernicious to the public, the growing evils of superstition and enthusiasm; to point out the true rules and the true end of human life; and to promote the practice of religion and virtue as the only means of attaining happiness both in the present and in a future state,

C O N-





# CONTENTS.

## DISCOURSE I.

**M**AN a free agent --- a lawgiver to himself---and a judge of his own actions tried by self-enforced as well as self-prescribed laws.

What is the proper end of human agency, and what are the proper means of attaining this end.

Virtue and vice defined.

Progression from virtue to religion.

# CONTENTS.

## DISCOURSE II.

Proofs of a Deity—of one universal mind—one eternal agent, and one supreme governor and lawgiver to all inferior agents.

What is the end of divine laws.

What is meant by the will of God, and by religion.

What is the end of religion, and what are the means to distinguish it from superstition and imposture.

The

# C O N T E N T S.

The evidences of revealed religion  
applied to christianity.

The character of a saint, with  
characteristics of true and false  
sanctity.

D E-



# CONTENTS

The evidence of revealed religion

applied to Christianity

The character of a false prophet

character of true and false

prophecy



# DEMONSTRATIONS

O F

## Religion and Virtue.

PSALM xvi. 3.

*All my delight is upon the saints  
that are in the earth, and such  
as excel in virtue.*

**W**HAT is here mentioned  
as the chief delight of the  
psalmist, is what must ever be the  
chief delight of a good mind,  
and

and must ever contribute to the happiness of rational beings, both in the present and in a future state. By means of powers derived from the first cause, from the only source of power, second causes are capable of producing the most desirable effects, and of leaving the most pleasing impressions on the soul. Our senses are made the inlets of numberless ideas, which gladden the heart, which supply the imagination with continual entertainment, and shut out every unwelcome occurrence from our thoughts. And yet the brightest and most beautiful scenes of nature, the enchantments of vision, and the charms of sound, import much lower



lower degrees of pleasure to the mind than intellectual perceptions, than objects arrayed with moral beauty, than a perfectly good character represented to us in proper colours and a true light. We cannot associate with the saints which are in the earth, and with such as excel in virtue ; nor can we observe a conduct under the direction of right principles, or partake of the benefits diffused by impartial beneficence, without the highest approbation and the highest delight. But since the most discerning of us are liable to errors in judging of moral excellence and personal merit, which are often seen through a glass darkly,

darkly, through mists of prejudice created either by the craft of hypocrisy, or by the force of slander, it's evident that all our delight is often built on a false foundation, on false notions of sanctity or false appearances of virtue, on unjust censure or undeserved praise. And since such errors as these are often fatal with respect to our actions as well as judgments, I shall here endeavour to obviate errors of this sort by describing the characters pointed out in my text, the characters of them who excel in virtue, and of them who are really saints upon earth.

In order to describe the character of such as excel in virtue,

tue, I shall first explain what is meant by virtue, and what are those essential properties which distinguish it from every opposite quality, from all affinity with vice.

A creature endued with the faculty of reason cannot exert that faculty without considering what he is, who he is, how he exists, why he exists, what is the end for which he was born, and what are the means of attaining this end. He perceives from hence, that some power superior to his own has given him life, and assigned him a place of habitation which he calls the world, replenished with all things necessary and convenient, not for  
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the sake of himself only, but of numberless other living-creatures ; for the sake of general utility and common good. Having found out a world, he then enquires who he is, and is self-informed that his body is under the guidance and government of a mind, an intelligent and reasoning substance, which prescribes laws to all his actions and all his active powers, the powers of conforming to laws, of preferring one object of agency to another, and of determining to fly from objects which provoke aversion, and to pursue those only which excite desire.

As man is a free agent, and a lawgiver to himself, so is he  
also

also accountable to himself, and is the judge of his own actions brought before the bar of conscience, and tried by laws which every agent can enforce as well as prescribe, can enforce by the sanctions of pleasure and pain felt on approving or disapproving of his actions, on finding them conformable or repugnant to the laws of his own mind. The laws thus prescribed being prescribed as rules for directing moral agents to some end of action, every man ought to consider what end is fittest for every one to attain, and what means are most conducive to that end. For such considerations as these enable him to perceive, that a

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power of procuring and preserving self-good is not only his own natural right, but also is the natural right of every other man, is a common and general right, which no one can subvert or invade without offending against the laws of nature, without incurring the sentence of self-condemnation, and the punishment of heart-felt remorse. He will therefore conclude from hence, that self-good, the good of every individual, or the happiness of every man, must needs be his proper end of action, it being the end which his own understanding recommends to his choice, and sets before him as his principal point of view. At  
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the same time he will also conclude, that the actions to be employed as means of attaining his proper end, are not such as tend only to promote partial and private happiness, but such as terminate in the mutual and common happiness of mankind. Discerning that these are right and fit, are good and becoming actions, since these are actions which conform to the true rules, and terminate in the true end of human life, he is led to a clear discernment of virtue, which consists in a conformity of action to the true rules of action, or in the exercise of a power imparted to all moral agents, a power to do such actions

as promote the common happiness of all. As the rules here mentioned are the rules of virtue, and actions are virtuous which conform to these rules, so when opposite rules of action are preferred to these, and men are guilty of evil-doing, of doing actions inconsistent with human happiness, such actions as these are vicious, vice being a wilful deviation from the true rules and the true end of human life.

A virtuous agent reflecting on his conduct, reflects with the utmost satisfaction on a conduct that claims approbation from every wise and good being in heaven and on earth. His conscience,  
 which

which is always void of offence, always speaks peace to his soul amidst the various troubles and tempests, the various dangers and distresses of life.

A vicious agent calling his past ways to remembrance, calls to remembrance, what he would gladly forget, lost time, perverted talents, misplaced affections, ungoverned passions, and actions hurtful to himself as well as others, and obnoxious to the punishments both of God and man. His mind, far from being a place of rest, is a place of continual terror and torment, is that infernal place where the worm never dies, and where the fire is not quenched.



How deformed and how detestable is vice, which breaks through divine and human laws, trampling on all things worthy of value, subverting every social advantage, shooting out the arrows of death, and scattering the firebrands of destruction through the world!

But how fair and lovely a form is the form of Virtue, which even the vicious cannot behold without admiration and without esteem! Full of grace art thou, o daughter of Wisdom, which is always thy guide, thy companion, and thy own familiar friend. Peace and Liberty are thy offspring: Harmony and Order are derived from thee. To  
Virtue

Virtue we owe whatever tends to enlarge, to exalt, to dignify the mind; we owe every inward satisfaction and every outward advantage; we owe all the rational hopes, and all the real enjoyments of life.

An agent delighting in them that excel in virtue, will always aspire after the same excellence, will copy after the same character, and transcribe into his own practice whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are lovely and of good report. He will thus be found, by a blameless and bright example, to instruct the minds and reform the manners of inferior agents, to attract

the admiration of every eye, and to engage the esteem of every heart. His whole life will become a pattern of universal imitation, and a subject of universal praise. He will never be weary of well-doing; will still be going on to perfection, and advancing from strength to strength, from one degree of improvement to another, till at length he is capable of adding to knowledge faith, and to faith godliness, and of delighting not only in them that excel in virtue, but also in the saints which are on the earth.

The steps which gradually lead to this higher character, and the means which exalt morality into religion,



religion, and enforce natural obligations by supernatural motives, will be marked out in another discourse, in which the views of every virtuous agent will be raised from finite to infinite delight, and to those endless joys which will hereafter be revealed through JESUS CHRIST our Lord, to whom be glory and praise now and evermore.

182

James M. Smith



## DISCOURSE II.

PSALM xvi. 3.

*All my delight is upon the saints  
that are on the earth, and  
such as excel in virtue.*

AS the amiable picture of  
virtue was held forth to  
view in my last discourse, I shall  
now describe the saints that are  
on the earth under their proper  
characters, in order to impress  
the fairer and more lovely image  
of religion on your minds.

The laws of virtue, which are  
laws of nature, laws which regu-  
late



late human actions under the natural government of reason, or under the exercise of a legislative and self-ruling power implanted in human minds, are laws written in the hearts of men by the hand of God himself. For the laws here mentioned being rules which direct the actions of men to an end proposed by the supreme governor, by a perfectly wise and good legislator, such rules as these ought to be received and to be followed as divine laws. As we cannot suppose that the Creator would give laws to the whole creation, and would regulate the motions, not only of the heavenly bodies, but also of every

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ry earthly production, and at the same time would abandon man to lawless will, and undirected impulse ; so we cannot but infer from hence, that a self-governing power, or a power of directing our actions to their proper end by self-prescribed laws, which is given to us, is not our own gift, but the gift of him in whom we live, and move, and have our being ; of him who communicated every other gift and faculty to man, who made all things, and is supreme law-giver and ruler of all.

Had not something eternally existed nothing could now exist, since existence cannot result from non-existence ; nor could any  
thing

thing begin to act was there not  
 an agent without beginning, since  
 action must then have resulted  
 from an unactive and inadequate  
 cause. And since every agent  
 is capable of perceiving an end  
 of action, and of reasoning on  
 the means conducive to this end,  
 the perceptive and reasoning fa-  
 culties with which every agent  
 is furnished, must needs be fa-  
 culties inherent in a mind. But  
 since a mind could never have  
 been, unless it had always been  
 in the universe, and could only  
 derive its original from some un-  
 originate mind, it follows that  
 there must be a first, unorigi-  
 nate, soveraign, and universal mind,  
 which regulates the actions of  
 every



every agent, which imparts efficacy to every cause, and assigns an end to every effect.

As GOD is the one universal mind, the one supreme agent, and the one supreme governor and lawgiver to all inferior agents, so the only end that GOD can propose in giving laws to all inferior agents is universal good. As he then can propose no other end in giving laws to mankind but every man's self-good, which is the general good of mankind, and as these divine laws are inscribed on the minds of all men, so must the will of GOD consist of these laws, which direct all men to the end proposed by the supreme mind. And as all men are under the strongest obli-

obligations to obey the will of God, so obedience to his will, or conformity of action to the divine laws, is what is meant by religion, at least by religion traced out by the human mind, which cannot discover the will of God in any other laws or rules of action but such as direct free agents to their proper end.

That the general good and happiness of man is the end of all divine laws, and consequently of all human actions, is a truth deduced from the strongest arguments of reason, and the clearest reports of sense. To make man for the sake of making him unhappy, is to apply the infinite  
power

power of the Creator to no wise or good purpose, since a weak and indigent creature depending entirely on an infinitely powerful being, cannot excite the fear or envy of such a being, who cannot propose the unhappiness of his creatures as the end of their creation on any motives fit to be imputed to the supreme mind.

Had man been made by a malevolent creator, he had then been made a malevolent creature, without natural affection, or social instinct; hating all men, and hated by all; studious of evil, and averse to good. His inward state had been a state of anarchy and distraction; had been a

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chaos



chaos of darkness and disorder ; had been destitute of truth and virtue, of harmony and peace. But since his mind, when not prepossessed by false principles, and his heart when not perverted by vicious passions, constantly produce virtuous actions, his only self-approved actions, he cannot be the offspring of a malevolent being ; he must be the work of an all-good as well as all-powerful hand.

But the infinite goodness of God is fully displayed when we turn our eyes to the visible creation, and behold that regularity and order which every where reign, and every where result from  
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a constant subjection to the divine laws. We see there that all things co-operate for good, and concur by one common direction to one common end, to the mutual support and interest of all. We see too, that the various productions of the earth are subservient to the most beneficial purposes, supplying the wants of numberless living-creatures, and furnishing mankind not only with the necessaries and conveniences of life, but also with manifold entertainments which charm the senses, and ravish the mind with delight.

As it thus appears that universal good is the end of all the

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works,

works, of all the actions, and all the laws of GOD, so must it also appear that the good of mankind is the end of religion, or the end for which the divine will is manifested to human understandings, and for which GOD has inscribed laws on the minds of men, directing every human action to its proper end. The laws here mentioned being the rules of virtue, it's evident that the practice of religion is the practice of virtue, strengthened by divine authority and by motives suggested by GOD, the motives of reverence and honour, of gratitude and esteem, which oblige all inferior agents and inferior minds



minds to yield obedience to the supreme agent and the supreme mind. And since men of every nation and language, who follow the light of nature and attend to the voice of reason, are capable of knowing GOD, of finding out the divine will, and of distinguishing religious truth from the errors of superstition, it's merely by means of natural religion, or the knowledge of GOD and his will applied as the standard of religious truth, that our minds are capable of judging whether supernatural revelations of the will of GOD have ever been made, and whether persons professing to teach doctrines by a commis-

sion from GOD are really sent by him, or else are false teachers and deceivers of mankind. For if we were not naturally enabled to acquire the knowledge of GOD and his will, and to discern between divine revelation and human imposture, it would not be possible to build either religion or virtue on a firm foundation, or to overthrow the false arguments and fraudulent practices which uphold immorality and superstition, and even idolatry and *atheism* in the world.

Wherever any pretended revelation is composed of doctrines and precepts which authorize unjust or cruel actions, and encourage

rage men to hate and persecute, to oppress and enslave and even to destroy one another, we are there to reject such pretences as these, not only as vain and groundless, but also as impious and contradictory to the will of God. Wherever religion is taught as a divine revelation for no other end but to promote the common good of mankind, to enforce the laws of nature by supernatural sanctions, by sanctions which annex infinite rewards to virtue and infinite punishments to vice in a life after death, and to confirm those hopes of immortality which reason itself excites in our breasts, what is thus taught and

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thus built on apparent grounds of probability, may be embraced as revealed truth, especially since our own understandings suggest the necessity of divine revelation, and recommend it as no less agreeable to the perfections of GOD, than conducive to the supreme happiness of man.

But where shall a well-disposed and unprejudiced person, seeking after revelation, find it, unless where christianity is planted, and where it brings forth its proper fruits in the minds and morals of men? The religion of CHRIST is founded on a rock that cannot be shaken; is a religion without beginning of days or end  
of

of time, it being the will of the eternal lawgiver, who is the same to-day, yesterday, and for ever.

The precepts of the gospel, <sup>x</sup> which are precepts of the utmost moral purity, supply us with unerring rules of action, and direct every agent to his ultimate good. Whatever tends to cast out the evil spirit of superstition, to expel inhumanity from human breasts, and to transform man into the image of GOD, is expressly enjoined in the two great commandments of the christian law. To love GOD, is to love and to imitate that perfect goodness which is every where proposed to our love and imitation in all the effects

fects of nature, in all the dispensations of providence, and in all the divine works. To love our neighbour as ourselves, is to love one another as brethren, all men being sons of the same father, who hath made us all for the same purposes, for the enjoyment of that common happiness, which his will points out as our common end. For the second commandment is like unto the first in its moral efficacy, and lays us under the strongest obligations to excel in virtue, to discharge every social duty, and to extend our beneficence to the whole human race.

The two great commandments  
of



of the gospel being the two principal laws of natural religion, and the doctrines of the gospel which propose to our belief miraculous facts and events, being credible doctrines, and such as are necessary to prove the divine mission of CHRIST, and to enforce his laws, which would otherwise be rendered of no more use than philosophical precepts, it follows from hence that they who embrace christianity as a divine revelation, embrace it on the most rational proofs, and build their faith on the clearest external as well as internal evidences of truth.

When men professing christianity regulate their lives by its precepts,

precepts, they will then excel in religion no less than in virtue, and may then be ranked amongst the saints that are on the earth. But if sanctity is not seated in a good heart, and is not seen in good actions; if it bears the least affinity with superstition, or holds the least fellowship with vice, it then is false and fictitious and not real sanctity, which consists in obedience to the moral government of heaven, to the natural and revealed will of God. Tho' our faith may seem sufficient to remove mountains; though we give our bodies to be burned, and on this account are canonized as martyrs; though we continue  
daily

daily in the temple and in the synagogues, making long prayers, complying with all the rituals of devotion, conforming to every mode of worship, and living in constant communion with a church that pretends to infallibility, and boasts of a power to forgive sins and confer salvation, yet we cannot be saints, we cannot be christians if we neglect the weightier duties of justice and mercy, or if ever our faith, instead of working by love, is productive of enmity and hatred, of persecution and violence amongst men.

A saint, whilst he is on the earth, will have his conversation  
in



in heaven, will tread in the steps of just men made perfect; will always be looking unto JESUS as the guide and example of his practice, as well as the author and finisher of his faith. With angelic piety he will join more than heroic virtue, and will preserve a character full of merit together with a conscience void of offence. Having weaned his affections from every undeserving object, he will lay an entire restraint on all lawless and sinful passions, on all irregular motions of flesh and blood. He will clearly perceive that intellectual enjoyments are of far greater value than sensual gratifications during

during the longest course of voluptuousness, which must soon expire in vanity and vexation of spirit. His heart will therefore be fixed on that place where true joys are only to be found; on those endless pleasures which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard; and on those immense rewards which are laid up for us in heaven, through JESUS CHRIST our Lord, to whom be glory and praise world without end.

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147  
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The H. N. D.





